

Three-legged buffaloes roam the rarity range

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions about coins and currency:

Q—Santa gave me several Indian-head nickels for Christmas. I'm told that one such coin is extremely rare because the buffalo [on the tails side] has only three legs. Are the nickels really valuable?—G.D., Chicago.

A—The buffalo's right-front leg is missing from some 1937 Denver Mint nickels because of a mistake made that year in the coin production process. Dealers sell the normal four-legged 1937-D nickel for about 50 cents in "fine condition"; the three-legged variety retails for more than \$200 in "fine."

Q—Precisely how will officials of the Los Angeles Olympics spend the money they receive from the sale of the government's commemorative coins? Will any of the funds support athletes from Communist countries?—J.H., Berwyn.

A—Part of the proceeds go to the United States Olympic Committee to train U.S. Olympic athletes and to support local amateur athletic programs in this country, according to a Treasury Department spokesman. The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee will use an equal share to help promote and stage the Olympic games.

Q—Now that the government is no longer making Lincoln cents out of mostly copper, is this the time to start saving the copper cents?—C.K., Glenview.

A—Readers have asked this question more often than any other during the past year. The answer remains: No. The price of copper would have to more than double before the copper in a "traditional Lincoln" is worth more than 1 cent.

Q—How many colors has Uncle Sam used for the seals on our currency?—J.S., Villa Park.

A—Six on small-size currency printed since the late 1920s: green [Federal Reserve notes produced currently], red [United States notes], blue [silver certificates], gold [gold certificates], brown [National Bank notes and silver certificates marked "Hawaii"] and yellow [silver certificates made for use in Europe and North Africa during World War II].

Q—I have a complaint about the government's \$10 gold piece honoring the 1984 Olympics. Why don't they make the coin with pure gold? Why spoil the gold by mixing it with copper?—J.N., Rockford.

A—Copper doesn't spoil gold; rather, it hardens the yellow metal, protecting the design from wear. Such coinage practices originated in ancient times.

By the way, even with copper, gold still will account for 90 percent of the metal composition in the 1984-dated Olympic commemorative, the same metal mixture as used in U.S. gold coins minted before 1933.